DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 340 911 CE 060 111

AUTHOR Dyer, Delwyn A.; Williams, Oscar M.
TITLE Developing Effective and Efficient Local Committees. Revised.
INSTITUTION Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Blacksburg.; Virginia Polytechnic Inst. and State Univ., Blacksburg. Center for Volunteer Development.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 23p.; For related documents, see CE 060 109-113.
AVAILABLE FROM Center for Volunteer Development, CVD Suite, Donaldson Brown Center, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0150 (Publication No. 301-023).
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

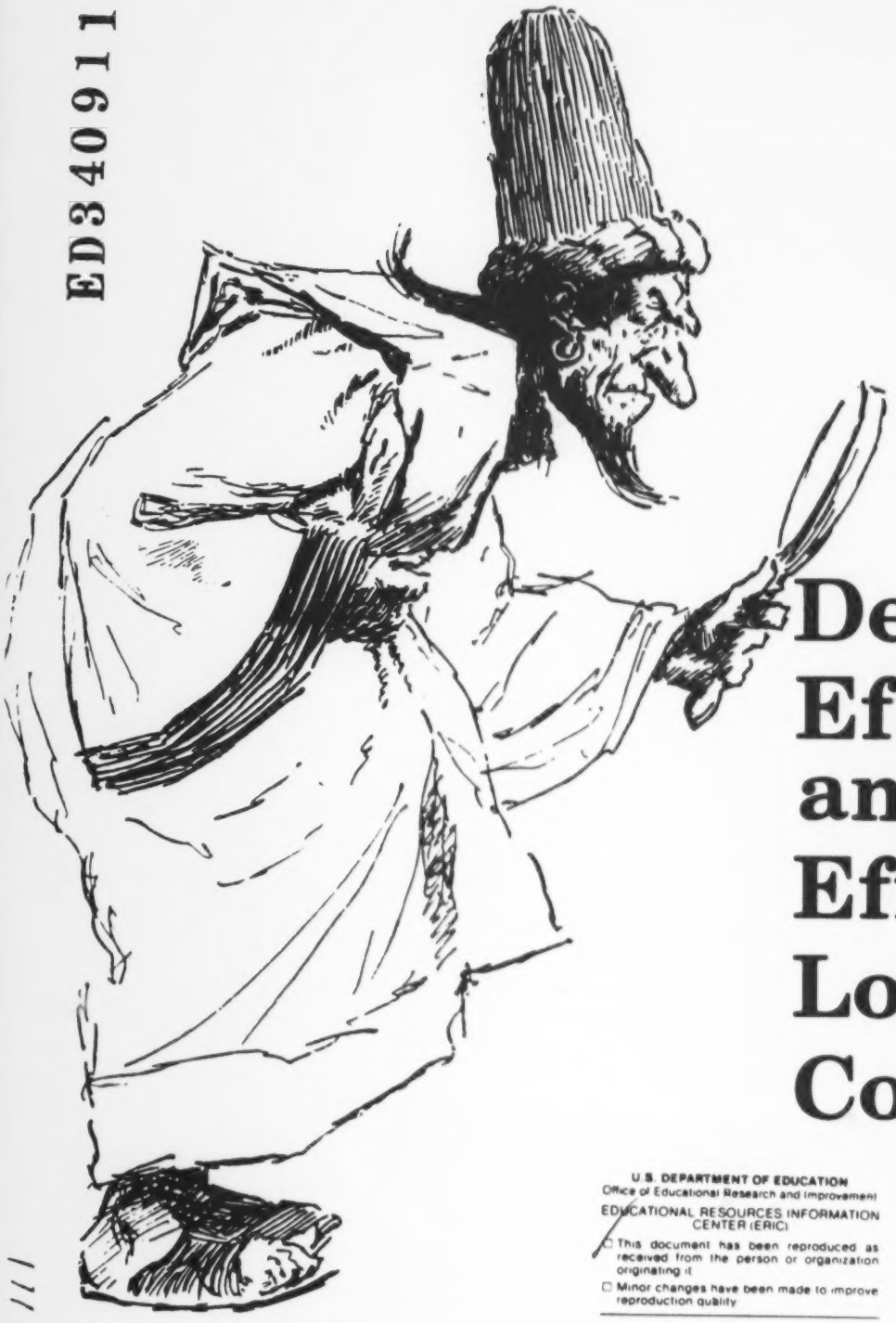
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administration; *Committees; *Community Organizations; Governing Boards; Organizational Effectiveness; Organizational Objectives; Organizations (Groups); Participative Decision Making; Personnel Selection; Planning; Problem Solving
IDENTIFIERS Consensus

ABSTRACT

Local community leaders should examine the principles involved in making committees an effective and efficient tool in group operations. A committee assists the parent organization in developing programs, carrying out business, establishing policies, executing affairs, and evaluating an organization's effectiveness. Committees have many social, educational, political, and financial advantages. The two types of committees--standing and special--use checks and balances to assess committee effectiveness and need. The purpose and responsibilities of the committee and selection of qualified applicants are two organizational considerations. Committees may have advisory or decision-making functions. Selection of a chairperson and committee members should be done with care; the qualities and responsibilities should be defined. The composition, size, and selection of a committee are important considerations. Mistakes in appointing committees are made because appointing authorities have relied on traditional selection procedures. Effective committee operation is achieved by reaching consensus through problem-solving techniques. (The following are included: 11 references; a committee instruction/information sheet; committee assignment sheet; the 24-inch rule for chairpersons; and individual member committee worthiness checklist.) (NLA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED340911



Developing Effective and Efficient Local Committees

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

O Whitacre

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Virginia Cooperative Extension Service • Virginia Tech and Virginia State • Virginia's Land-grant Universities

Publication 301-023 • Revised 1988

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 060 111

Community Resource
Development

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Virginia Cooperative Extension Service programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicap, or political affiliation. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and September 30, 1977, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Mitchell R. Geasler, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, and Vice Provost for Extension, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia; Clinton V. Turner, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia.

Developing Effective and Efficient Local Committees

Delwyn A. Dyer, Extension Specialist and
Director, Center for Volunteer Development

Oscar M. Williams, Extension Specialist and
Associate Director, Center for Volunteer Development

Introduction

Committees are vital to efficient group operations in a democratic or pluralistic society. Despite the many jokes such as, "A camel is a horse put together by a committee" or "a committee is a group of the unfit trying to lead the unwilling to do the unnecessary," a present day democratic group simply cannot function unless it selects or appoints a smaller group to attend to certain matters.

As society adjusts to the rapid changes brought on by technological advances—computer, transportation and communication systems—it becomes increasingly important that organizations and community groups assign their best minds to determining effective uses of their scarce resources. Consequently, new importance must be assigned to developing effective and efficient committee operations. No longer can the group's resources be wasted.

The purpose of this publication is to set forth in everyday language for local community leaders a few principles involved in taking the waste out of committees and making them an effective tool in group operations.

What is a Committee—an Effective and Efficient Committee?

Effectiveness is defined as doing the right things. Efficiency means doing things right. Webster's New World Dictionary defines committee as "a group of persons chosen, as from the members of a legislature or club, to consider some matter of function in a certain capacity." Webster's definition of committee may serve well the idea of *who* is selected, but it omits the *how to* of selection. For those groups that have limited time, staff members, and resources, a committee must be more. It must be a group of persons *committed* to the assigned task. To be effective and efficient, this group of committed individuals must be perceived as having the experience and knowledge base necessary to carry out the assigned task within the allotted time.

This group of persons make up the backbone of larger organizations. Such groups make up the organization's programs, devise ways and means of carrying out the organization's business; in absence of the total membership establish policies and plans and execute the affairs of the body; and, in the final analysis, evaluate the

organization's effectiveness. Committees in this sense are not a group of persons forming a new organization. It is a designated group of individuals already within, and a part of, a group already formed. In another sense, a committee is a device for limiting and sharing certain specific work and responsibilities of the larger group. A committee is limited in several ways. It is limited to the job it has to do; its tools—the finances, persons available for which it must cooperatively work, experiences of its membership, the technical resources available to it, and time allotted for the completion of its task. Committees are extensions of the parent body, and consequently, share the policies of that body. It may even be said, in this regard, that committees are influenced by the mission and purposes of the organization that creates them.

Purposes of Committees

Simply stated, the general purpose of committees is to assist the parent organization by taking on and giving specific attention to certain details, problems, or concerns facing the parent body. Specifically, their purposes will vary according to the specific need for which they were created to respond. Such specific need may range from consideration of budgeting problems, publicity ventures, and membership campaigns, to investigation of member actions or training of future leaders. Whenever committees are appointed, their specific tasks should be pointed out to them.

Effective committees can be the most important working force of the organization. This is particularly true if committee members are selected for the contribution they can make and not merely because it is their time to serve. Whereas every member of the group should have an opportunity to serve on a committee, no member should be placed on a committee of which he has no interest or potential to make a contribution.

The Advantages of Committees

The advantages of committeees are many. Some of these:

1. They involve more members in the work of the organization. They thus enable the programs of the organization to be more solidly grounded in the desires of the people they serve; providing greater linkage to more "publics," and affording the possibility of broader-based community representation.

2. The quality of the group decision is enhanced. Experience has shown that people work more effectively in smaller groups than in larger ones or as isolated individuals, particularly if committee assignments are based on member interests. The time required to reach a decision by the smaller group is substantially less than if the entire larger body were involved. Additionally, a smaller group may make greater use of problem solving techniques. It is easier for them to: define the problem and set the limits within which the group wants to work, identify the situations which will have to be changed if the problem is to be solved, set goals, identify the obstacles and devise a plan of action.
3. They provide excellent training ground for future leaders for the parent organization. This smaller group provides experiences and other opportunities for leadership talents to be developed and appraised. In a sense, inexperienced leaders are afforded an apprenticeship for higher offices within the organization.
4. They provide members with the opportunity to get to know each other and appreciate their worth. This is especially important if the organization is multi-racial, multi-cultural, or is composed of members of different economic and social levels or a wide geographic territory.
5. The experience and training of a wider representation of the organization's membership is marshalled to focus on the specific organizational problems. Therefore, more meaningful and creative solutions can be generated. Aside from these important contributions, committees have decidely important advantages.

* Committees may discuss delicate or controversial matters that should not, for reasons of legality or good taste, be considered more publicly. Such matters may be those relating to personnel or internal policies.
* Important organizational decisions can be made without strict adherence to parliamentary procedures. Other rules may also be relaxed. Therefore, each committee member can discuss organizational business more freely and make a greater contribution to total discussion. Members are less leary of having their ideas ridiculed by the larger body.
* It is easier to convene a small group than a large one—the parent body. Smaller groups can assemble at a member's home or at lunch, thereby avoiding the problems and expenses of renting or searching for large conference rooms and related communication equipment. Such flexibility is indispensable if the group must work within the scheduling constraints of outside experts or resource persons.
* Time is saved at the general meeting. A committee properly composed of adequate representation of the parent body should arrive at a decision quite similar to the one that would be reached by the larger group had it been involved, but in less time.

Types of Committees

Committees are basically of two types—standing committees and special committees. *Standing committees* are usually specified along with the major responsibilities in the by-laws or constitution of the organization. In general, most organizations need only a few standing committees. They are normally such committees as: membership, nominating, finance, program, and publicity. The nature of the work of standing committees is fairly constant and on-going. Members normally serve staggered terms. Such a procedure has merit because it allows new members the opportunity to serve alongside old committee members, thus learning the committee process while maintaining the continuity of the committee's work. Staggered terms are not necessarily the rule. Some organizations allow or specify that committee membership change

with each of the terms of its officers. Such a system, needless to say, can be counter productive unless a radical change is needed for the revitalization of the committee around the parent organization's mission.

Special committees handle most of the matters confronting the organizations. Special committees are generally "one shot committees." They are selected to do special things only. Normally, they are appointed as questions, issues, programs, problems, or the need for specific types of information arises. Once their report is made, they are no longer needed and should be dissolved. For this reason, at any given time, the organization may have numerous special committees; then at another time, few, if any, will exist.

A special type of special committee is the committee of the whole. This committee is convened when the parent body determines that a question is of such significance that the entire body should assume responsibility for its study and resolution. The parent body, upon a motion duly seconded, temporarily removes itself from its status as the parent organization and assumes the status of a committee. While in this committee status, it considers the matter before it. It may recommend a course of action to itself as parent body, or perform any other function of a committee.

To formally act upon the course of action decided while as a committee of the whole, the parent body must formally dissolve itself as the committee of the whole, re-convene itself as the parent body, and proceed to act upon its recommendation as it would any other recommendation brought by a standing or special committee.

Oops! Is This Committee Really Necessary?

Committees are often appointed when they are not necessary. In many instances, valuable manpower is wasted through needless committee work. Consideration should be given to the fact that eight people working just one hour is the equivalent of one day's work. If these persons were to be paid commensurably to their wages and fringe benefits, most organizations would soon find themselves in a financial crisis. Efficiency demands that the question be asked, "Is this committee necessary?"

A good rule to follow before creating a new committee is to re-examine existing ones.

There is no need to create a new committee if an existing one is available and can do the job. It might be discovered that some of the committees are no longer needed and should be disbanded, freeing its members for other task assignments. Neither is there a need to set up a committee when the mission of the organization is clear, the membership agrees that a certain action should be undertaken, and it is agreed that one person can do the job. A new committee should be set up only when there is a real need.

To guard against the proliferation and self-perpetuation of excessive committees, the members should be told at the time of their appointments, the length of the committee's duration. Some special committees, because of the nature of their work, may require a lifespan of several years. In such cases, it is wise to appoint the committee members for staggered terms. New members often bring new ideas or fresh approaches to the matter under consideration.

Sometimes when a group is left intact from year to year it tends to become self-perpetuating. That is, having finished their original task, they create new work for themselves to do. Then, having completed that work without being disbanded they again make new work for themselves. Consequently, it is recommended that once a committee has finished the task for which it was created and has made its final report, the chairman of the parent organization should thank the committee members and announce the committee's disbandment.

Kinds of Committees

Various names are given committees. Some are called fact-finding, special event,

alternative seeking, special activity, etc. There are, however, basically two kinds of committees—advisory and decision making. Committees are either elected by the membership, appointed by the President, or by some combination of these methods. For example, some organizations elect or appoint a chairman and allow the chairman to complete the committee.

At the time of their appointment, the committee members should be informed whether they are being asked to serve on a committee that has decision-making powers or one that had advisory functions only. No committee has any more power than that specifically granted it by the parent organization.

Advisory committees have the responsibility of advising the parent body on matters for which it is specifically created, i.e., policy, technical matters, programs, procedures, studies, etc. It does not have the authority to establish policies for the organization or specify programs. The committee presents its plans, findings, and/or recommendations to the parent body for their consideration. The parent body will decide to accept or reject the committee's report. Only if the committee's report is accepted *and* the committee is asked to implement its plans, is the committee within the limits of its authority to proceed.

Decision making committees make decisions within the limits and authority granted them by the parent body. Decisions made by a committee beyond the authority granted the committee are termed *ultra vires* decisions and such decisions may not bind the parent organization. These decisions may be legally binding on the individuals that made the decision. This is particularly true if contractual commitments are made with groups external to the organization. Many members of decision making committees have, for their own protection, begun requesting the parent body to provide them written instruction, clearly spelling out the limits of their authority, their reporting procedures, and other specific duties or responsibilities for which they are charged.

Organizing a Committee to Work

Efficient and effectively working committees require clear tasks and people who can do the assigned task. Rarely, if ever, do effective and efficient committees fall out of the sky. They are organized on earth. Those whose responsibility it is to establish committees must never take this organizational task lighty. Two of the most important considerations are:

1. Clearly defining the purpose and responsibilities of the committee, and
2. Selecting qualified committee members.

Purpose and Responsibility of the Committee

When a committee is appointed, its purposes and responsibilities should be placed in writing, clearly defined. That is:

1. its members should understand why it was set up
2. its members should know its assignments or task(s) to be accomplished
3. its members should know when its assignments (tasks) are due (deadlines)
4. the committee should know how and when it is to report

Additionally the committee should:

1. have a name
2. be informed of its budget limitations, and
3. be informed of its relationship and/or shared responsibilities with other committees

An instruction/information sheet as the one shown on page 6 may be a helpful aid for committee members.

COMMITTEE INSTRUCTION/INFORMATION SHEET

_____
Date Appointed

_____ Type: Standing Special
Name of Committee

Purpose: _____
Study, Fact-finding, Program, Membership, Finance, Etc.

Specific Duties and Responsibilities: _____

_____

_____

_____

Committee Chairperson: _____
Name Address

_____
Phone: Work Home

Committee members: _____
Name Address Phone

_____

_____

Reporting: _____
Time, To Whom, Schedule

Financial Consideration: _____
Budget Amount/Restrictions

Collaboration/Coordinator: _____
Committees, Resource Persons

_____
Experts Printed Materials

Termination Date: _____

Other: _____

_____

Selecting a Chairperson and Committee Members

An important consideration in forming a committee is the type of persons who will be included for membership. Some bodies allow the chairperson of the parent organization to appoint the committee chairman and all of the committee members. Other groups vary the procedure for selecting chairpersons and/or members by allowing their President to appoint the committee chairperson who will, in turn, assume the responsibility of selecting other members. Still, other groups appoint the total committee. Regardless of the procedure, it should be done with care.

Qualities of the Chairperson

An individual who chairs a committee must be able to inspire the confidence of others. This individual must be interested in the job and be willing to be *a part of*, rather than *apart from* the team. Aside from facilitative and interpersonal skill, the chairperson must possess or be willing to acquire a working knowledge of the matter confronting the committee.

Additional qualities may also be required of the chairperson. Among these are:

1. respect for the opinions of others
2. ability to work with others
3. ability to listen as well as speak
4. belief in the ability of the group to make quality decisions
5. ability to understand the committee's tasks clearly
6. ability to develop a committee plan that considers the following:
   - —a wholesome atmosphere for discussion
   - —an orderly procedure for conducting meetings
   - —a balanced involvement of all members
   - —an accurate record of the committee's proceedings
   - —a meeting schedule that assures every member participation
   - —linkage with outside resources

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

The chairperson is responsible for the general decorum of the meeting. Additionally, the chairperson should be familiar with consensus seeking and other problem-solving techniques, understand the steps in the problem solving and decision making process, and be able to conduct a meeting with dignity and dispatch.

Effective chairpersons distribute work and share leadership responsibilities. In this regard they:

1. insure that all members know each other
2. request literature or information and make it available for the members
3. set the time for the meeting, arrange a suitable place, and notify members of such
4. prepare for meetings by:
   - —analyzing committee's job and making tentative plans
   - —developing specific plans and an agenda for each meeting
   - —checking facilities and equipment before each meeting
   - —providing committee members an advance copy of the agenda and other pertinent materials
5. conduct the meeting in a business-like manner by:
   - —opening and closing the meeting on time
   - —keeping the discussion on relevant matters
   - —using interpersonal skill to involve all members
   - —informally polling the members to see if the group has reached a consensus
   - —clarifying or summarizing points of agreement or disagreement
   - —insuring that the minutes accurately reflect the group's decision
   - —clearly establishing future meeting plans
6. Follow-up on individual committee member assignments by:
   - —notifying members of the date, time, form, and place their reports/assignments are due
   - —helping committee members work out or work through assignment difficulties, i.e., red tape with other persons or agencies
   - —recommending alternative methods or approaches to problem assignments
7. Share recognition and "product" ownership with all members and publicly thank them for the good work they have done.

To facilitate the distribution of work assignments, the following chart may be helpful

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Name of Committee: _____

Date Appointed: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Overall Job to be Done: _____

_____

_____

Individual Assignments

Date	Name	Specific Job	Materials Provided	Deadlines	
				To Be Done	Actually Done

Good committee chairpersons may want to test their facilitative skills. The following twenty-four inch rule may be helpful for that purpose.

INCHES	(Check One) (3) ALWAYS	(2) SOMETIMES	(1) NEVER
1. Do I know all the members of our committee, their backgrounds and relevant skills, etc?			
2. Do I know what our specific task is and when it is to be completed?			
3. Do I know what resources are available to do our work? How to get additions if necessary?			
4. Am I clear on the committee's assigned task and its importance to the organization?			
5. Do I know what other committees our committee must work with, make recommendations to, etc.? If so, have I made this matter clear to all?			
6. Do I get all possible information to the members in sufficient time before the meeting?			
7. Is the time, place, and date of the meeting clear to all members? If there are any changes, do all members know about them?			

(Rule continued)

	(3) ALWAYS	(2) SOMETIMES	(1) NEVER
8. Have I checked the facilities at the meeting place?			
9. Do I know the manner or form in which our report must be given? And to whom, when, etc.?			
10. Do I know the formal and informal rules for conducting meetings?			
11. Have I prepared an agenda that will help the group do its work?			
12. Do members know how to get items on the agenda?			
13. Do I start meetings on time?			
14. Do I discuss questions to encourage participation?			
15. Do I help clarify issues?			
16. Do I try to get less vocal members to participate?			

(Rule continued)

	(3) ALWAYS	(2) SOMETIMES	(1) NEVER
17. Can I manage disagreements without getting personally involved?			
18. Am I tolerant of members whose opinions I disagree with?			
19. Can I manage disagreements based on facts rather than fiction?			
20. Do I move expeditiously from topic to topic?			
21. Have I made the decisions reached clear to all?			
22. Have I made the assignment clear to those who must carry it out?			
23. Do all members know when the next meeting is scheduled?			
24. Do I end meetings on time?			

Scoring Scale
60 - 72 Excellent
45 - 67 Good
36 - 42 Poor
0 - 33 Very Poor

Composition Consideration of Effective and Efficient Committees

The composition of a committee is an important consideration for an efficient and effective organization. The chairperson or appointing authority is wise to consider the types of people included in the parent organization and insure their inclusion on the committee. Some important considerations pertaining to the composition of a committee include the following:

1. Types of people in the parent organization that have an interest in the kind of activity in which the committee will be engaged.
2. Individuals with knowledge or skills or access to information needed by the committee
3. Individuals that need to develop a greater sense of belonging or commitment to the goals or mission of the organization
4. Representatives from within the parent organization from different:
   —racial backgrounds
   —ethnic groups
   —points of view
   —socio-economic levels
   —geographic locations
   —age and sex groups
5. Groups that have not been represented in previous committees

Size—What Size is Best for This Committee

The size of a committee can affect its efficiency. Too many cooks can spoil any soup. A major reason for appointing a smaller group is to take advantage of its efficiency over the larger body.

Consideration should be given to the purpose for which the committee was formed in determining its size. Consequently, if the task requires only two or three persons, only two or three persons should be selected. In a real sense only the optimum number of persons needed to fulfill the purpose(s) of the committee should be appointed.

Selection of Individual Members

Generally speaking the same consideration should be given to the selection of committee members as was given to the selection of the chairperson and committee composition. However, the following additional considerations may also be given:

1. individuals who are affected by the issue
2. individuals who are personally interested in the concern under consideration
3. individuals whose leadership potential would be enhanced by membership on the committee
4. individuals willing to work together for the good of the organization although they may hold different viewpoints about certain matters
5. individuals with a positive attitude despite differences of opinions
6. individuals who will serve with commitment

Interested committee members may want to rate themselves and their "committee worthiness." The following checklist may be helpful in this regard.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBER COMMITTEE WORTHINESS CHECKLIST

	DEFINITELY NO 1	2	3	4	DEFINITELY YES 5
*Did I try to be on time for the meeting?					
*Was I clear on the assignment?					
*Did I prepare for the discussion by reading the material carefully and critically?					
*Did I indicate my interest by listening carefully?					
*Did I make an effort to become better acquainted with other members?					
*Did I look at the person who was speaking so as to see what was being said as well as hear what was being said?					
*Did I participate in the discussion and offer worthwhile comments objectively?					
*Did I relate my comments to those of the previous speaker?					
*Did I share the discussion with others?					
*Did I cooperate in exploring the problem before suggesting possible solutions?					
*Did I make a serious effort to distinguish fact from fiction?					
*Were my comments brief and to the point?					
*Were my comments based on the facts? Did I gain a new insight to clearer understanding of the other fellow's point of view					
*Did I generate any new ideas?					
*Did I concentrate on one phase of the topic at a time and stay with the discussion, instead of jumping out way ahead?					
*Did I work to the best of my ability to help the committee work on the task?					
*Did I leave the meeting with something further to think about?					

Scoring Scale

55 - 60 Excellent
45 - 55 Good
40 - 45 Fair
40 - below Poor

What are Some Common Mistakes in Appointing Committees?

Many committees have failed in efficiency and effectiveness because the appointing authorities have relied too heavily on traditional or customary selection procedures. Such committees have not followed the considerations outlined above. Consequently, they have fallen victim to some common mistakes, including some of the following:

1. **Failure to Bring in New People**

   Too often people are named to committees who are already active in other community activities. People who have not been involved in the past are often not considered. Some "experienced" leadership is needed on every committee. But the amount of time that such people can give to any one of their activities is usually limited. Bringing new people into the committee can provide it with fresh thought, renewed enthusiasm, and usually a greater ability to contribute needed manpower. New blood can provide the spark and drive missing in many community groups. Committees are a valuable training ground for new leaders. The placing of inexperienced members in committees with experienced leaders provided a valuable apprenticeship for greater leadership responsibilities in the future. We all have to learn somewhere.

2. **Appointing Only Persons Who Are In Agreement With The Philosophy Of The Person(s) Making The Appointment**

   If the issue is controversial and members are selected because they agree with the appointing body, opposing forces will be threatened and may unite to defeat the efforts of the committee. Diverse ideas and opinions enhance group creativity.

3. **Selecting A Local Authority Or Only Highly Knowledgeable Persons As Committee Persons Or As Chairperson Of The Committee**

   Selecting the school superintendent to head a local education committee is an example of this mistake. The "expert" will be more effective as a resource person to be consulted by the committee. A study committee with an authority as chairman is apt to rely too heavily on his recommendations, and fail to become actively involved in exploring the issue and recommending solutions.

4. **Use Of Emotional Appeals To Select Or Keep Committee Members**

   Involvement of members based on emotional appeals, including appeals to organizational pride, membership responsibility and/or sense of duty, usually is not effective for long. Reliance on emotionalism is a discredit to members in that it implies they are not capable of rational decisions. Instead, select and keep committee members by indicating to them why they were selected and why their unique combination of knowledge, skills, and interests is vital to the success of the committee and parent body as a whole.

5. **Relying Too Heavily On Volunteers**

   Only certain types of people volunteer themselves for committee positions. The group resulting from a call for volunteers is usually not representative of the skills, interests, and problem solving ability of the parent group or its mission. Membership on committees should be the result of conscious decision of the organization or its leadership and not be left to chance.

Effective Committee Operations

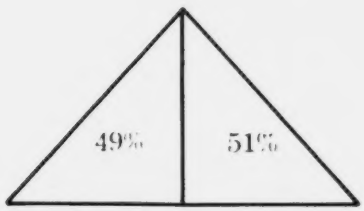
Having properly selected a chairperson and members, the committee with clear goals is almost ready to begin its task. What is left

is for the committee to decide its mode of operation.

There is little need for most committees to adhere to the icy formalities of parliamentary procedure. The committee can decide its own working rules. Experience has shown that high quality decisions are more often arrived at by reaching consensus through the following problem-solving approach rather than by use of parliamentary rules. This is particularly true with decision-making committees or when the parent body meets as a committee of the whole.

Reaching Consensus—A Useful Tool for Large Committees or Committees of the Whole

When decisions are made by voting and parliamentary rules, there often is a scramble to obtain votes to gain a majority. When conflicts arise, there is a tendency to call a vote to see which side will win. However, it should be remembered that a 51 percent majority vote is not a group decision, for almost half of the group is against the proposal.



In reaching a decision by consensus, the emphasis is on resolving differences and arriving at the best possible solution for the entire group. This process often takes more time, but time well spent. When conflicts arise, final decisions are delayed until more adequate solutions are designed by the group. In this cooperative endeavor, members come to see the need for some give and take. They come to see that what is more desirable for them as an individual is not always best for the entire group. They, as a group, take greater ownership in the decision reached. The maturity level of the group is raised.

When agreement is reached, it can be ratified, if necessary, by a request for a show of hands or a voice of all those in favor and those opposed. This vote can be recorded in the minutes as the official action of the group. With this approach, committee leaders and members can concentrate their most creative thinking on the task rather than focusing on the proper way to make and dispose of motions and amendments.

Most issues facing committees can be discussed and decided by consensus through an orderly problem-solving procedure. This step-by-step decision-making process can be modified to suit the needs of the situation. It is outlined below:

STEP 1. Describe the Issue or Problem Confronting the Committee

The first step is to describe the issue or the problem that needs a decision or action by the committee. At times it is helpful to have the problem stated in writing so committee members will have a clearer understanding of the issues confronting them.

With certain kinds of issues or concerns that may seem peripheral to the purpose of the committee, there may be a need to indicate why this particular issue should be of concern and how it relates to the purposes and goals of the committee. This is particularly true when the issue involves program planning or expenditure of funds. Reviewing the goals helps to keep the discussion centered on the overall mission of the group, thereby keeping the decision relevant to the problem.

STEP 2. Collect all Pertinent Information About the Problem

Decisions are arrived at much more readily when problems are clearly defined and well understood. Therefore, all pertinent facts and ideas about the problem should be presented. Everyone should participate in this process. Furthermore, careful distinction should be made between facts and opinions. The important thing is to have a complete and accurate picture so wise decisions can be made.

Many, perhaps most, decisions can be made right on the spot without additional information and often with very little discussion. However, if sufficient information is not readily available, it may be wise to defer action until the necessary data can be obtained. It, again, is beneficial to the body to involve the members in obtaining the needed information. However, occasionally, outside resources may need to be consulted.

STEP 3. Make a List of All Possible Solutions or Courses of Action

The tendency for most committees is to center their attention on one or two of the first proposals mentioned rather than to explore all of the possibilities. As a result, much creativity is lost, and much time is sometimes spent debating the merits of inadequate solutions. With ample opportunity to explore a greater variety of alternatives, the best thinking of the committee members can be combined to formulate the most effective solution and one that has the approval of the greatest number of members.

A valuable approach is for the chairperson to resist all attempts by the group to stop and discuss the advantages or disadvantages of any given proposal until the group has presented all of the possible alternatives. For some complex or difficult problems the committee may want to "brainstorm" ideas for a while to generate new ideas and alternative solutions. Or, the committee might want to put the list aside for a while and come back later to see if there are additional possibilities that were overlooked.

For complex problems it is helpful if the suggestions can be recorded on a chalk board or newsprint so they can be seen by everyone and referred to later. In a large committee, as a committee of the whole, an overhead projector is an effective way of presenting the problem or issue to the members.

STEP 4. Evaluate the Alternative Solutions and Set Priorities

Once the various alternatives have been listed, the committee is now ready to go back over the list and modify, combine, or select out the best possible solutions. The most creative thinking of the members should be directed toward formulating the best solution from all of the ideas that have been listed. Through a process of elimination, or possibly combining or revising items of the list, a final proposal is formulated. The proposal is then examined carefully in terms of the results that can be expected and the consequences that may result if adopted. Needed modifications, if any, can be made at this time. This process usually generates much interest and participation from members.

STEP 5. Make a Decision

When the solution is finally designed, it is helpful to have it read so everyone is clear on what is being proposed. This solution should be within the mission and philosophy of the parent organization. It should be economically viable, socially tenable and fair and considerate for those who pay as well as to those who benefit. A final touchup of the wording can be done at this time, if

needed, so the proposal clearly conveys the wishes of the group. At this point, the decision can be formalized through an expression of consensus or by a vote on a motion. For example, after reading the final version, the chairperson can say, "All in favor of this proposal say 'Aye'." If a more formal procedure is desired, the chairperson may ask if someone will state the proposal in the form of a motion. After the "Second" and an opportunity for any further discussion, a vote can be called. The results of the vote can then be recorded in the minutes. When the interests of the entire committee have been taken into account, there will seldom be any opposition at this point. If there happens to be any opposition, this too can be recorded if the group wishes.

STEP 6. Implement the Decision

When a committee decision calls for action it is appropriate to spell out the tasks and responsibilities that need to be completed, indicate the steps that are to be taken, and designate who is to do what and when. Then proceed with the task.

STEP 7. Evaluate the Results

Programs are evaluated rather than persons. The process is simple. In an ongoing program each step should be evaluated to see if changes need to be made in light of what has happened so far, so the program will be more effective in the future. At this stage, it is appropriate to compare what happened with what the committee had anticipated would happen. In effect, the questions are asked, "What would we do differently if we had it to do again?" "Why?"

STEP 8. Preparing the Report for the Parent Body

As the committee nears completion of its assigned task(s), or as the date for a report to the parent organization approaches, the chairman must direct the committee's attention to the form and procedure to be used in making the report.

It is often desirable for the report to be prepared in written form for the record. In addition, visual or audio visual presentation to the appointing group may facilitate their understanding of the committee's recommendations, plans, suggestions, etc.

If the committee is not clear on the manner or form (format) in which the report should be presented, the chairman should request this information from the appointing individuals or groups.

My Report Is In: What's Next?

Confusion often arises as to what should be done with a committee report once it has been given. The final decision rests with the organization. This is also true when the parent body forms itself into a committee of the whole. As indicated above, it must dissolve itself as a committee and reconvene itself as a Board or parent body and formally act upon the matter it decided upon as a committee. The nature of the charge given to the committee and the nature of the report both help to determine the action that the organization will be inclined to take. For example, if the committee is solely a fact-finding committee, the report can be received by the organization without much fan fare. The organization may wish to study the findings of the report (either in the meeting or between meetings) and make recommen-

dations for follow up study or action at a later date. Or, the organization may wish to approve the report, to reject it, or simply to file it and make it available to interested members of the organization. However, if the report included recommendations for action, careful attention should be given to it before it is adopted by the organization. The organization may wish to delay action until a later time or to refer it to another committee or officer for further study.

It has been observed that many organizatiopns treat all committee reports in essentially the same manner. In fact, the procedure often becomes so standardized that the person giving the report automatically moves that it be accepted (or approved). In acting on committee reports, organizations should not only understand the charge given to the committee, but also that there are several different actions that can be taken and that the consequences to the organization are quite different for each. The generally recommended practice is to call for a discussion of the report after it has been given. The organization decides through discussion how it wants to handle the report and then formalizes the decision with a motion.

Although a variety of committee reports require somewhat different actions, some rather standard procedures have been developed for the convenience of organizations in handling reports in a systematic and efficient manner. The following ways of acting on a committee report should be helpful. Reports may be:

Accepted or Filed

When a report is merely accepted by the organization (rather than approved), the organization is not bound nor committed to any recommendations or suggestions contained in the report. Routine reports or progress reports can be received even without a vote. The chairman can simply acknowledge receipt of the report and ask the secretary to file it. In fact, the term "filed" is sometimes used in preference to the term "accepted."

Approved or Adopted

When a report is approved or adopted, the organization binds itself to the opinions conclusions, and recommendations included in the report. For this reason, the organization should be certain that it is willing to indorse the report in its entirety before approving or adopting it.

Rejected

The organization may reject or accept any or all parts of a committee report.

Postponed

A decision on a report can be postponed until a later date. Normally the date for reconsideration should be specified.

Returned to the Committee

At times it is decided to return the report to the committee for additional work or clarification. In this instance, the committee should be given clear instructions on what is expected of it and when it is to report again.

Referred

Certain reports may be referred to an officer of the organization, to the board, or to another committee; for example, financial reports often are referred to an auditing committee. Certain reports may be referred to the historian of the organization or to the secretary.

In summary, the nature of the report will determine how it will be handled. The final decision rests with the organization.

Summary

A committee is only one part of the parent organization. Committees may not work together, but they must fit together. They must fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. To obtain this fit, the parent organization may need extensive planning to tie together all committees, officers, and plans into one meaningful program.

Remember, committees are essential to the parent organization. They are designed to relieve officers and the parent bodies of workloads, not to increase them. Therefore, time spent in selection, orientation, and clarification of responsibilities is time well spent. It helps to insure that the meetings are one of the *Board*, not *Bored*. It helps toward making committees—and eventually the parent organization—more effective and efficient.

References

1. *Better Boards and Committees,* Leadership Pamphlet #14, Chicago: Adult Education Association of the USA, 1957.
2. Conrad, William R. and Glenn, William E., *The Effective Voluntary Board of Directors: What It is and How It Works,* Athens, Ohio: The Swallow Press, 1983.
3. Dyer, Delwyn A. and Williams, Oscar M., *Developing Local Community Leaders,* Extension Publication #301-021, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, Extension Division, 1985.
4. Heasley, Daryl and Goss, Glen, *The Jobs of Members, Officers and Committees,* Pennsylvania State University, University Park: College of Agriculture.
5. Houle, Cyril O., *The Effective Board,* New York: Association Press, 1960, pp. 75-82.
6. Lowry, Sheldon and Holik, *A New Look at Parliamentary Procedures,* North Central Regional Extension Publication #48, Michigan State University: Cooperative Extension Service, 1976.
7. Nadler, Leonard and Nadler, Zeace, *The Conference Book,* Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing Company, 1977.
8. This, Leslie E., The Small Meeting Planner, Houston, Texas, Gulf Publishing Company, 1972.
9. *The Citizen Board in Voluntary Agencies,* United Way of America, 1979.
10. Tropman, John E., Harold R. Johnson, and Elmer J. Tropman, *The Essentials of Committee Management*, Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1979.
11. Word, Jr., U. G., *Committees: Purpose and Functions,* Agricultural Extension Service, Publication #MP93 (Ren.) University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture.